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VOICE CULTURE AND THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHER, TOWARD A GREATER ALLIANCE.

BY- REICHMANN, EBERHARD

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VOICE TRAINING SHOULD BE INCLUDED IN THE PREPARATION OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHERS, IF THEY ARE TO ACHIEVE THE GOAL OF APPROXIMATION OF NATIVE SPEECH. SINCE A FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHER'S MOST VALUABLE TOOL IS HIS OWN VOICE, A CULTURED VOICE IS DESIRABLE, IN BOTH THE NATIVE AND THE FOREIGN LANGUAGES. ONE OF THE REASONS THAT MANY TEACHER TRAINEES DO NOT ACHIEVE APPROXIMATION OF NATIVE SPEECH MAY BE THAT THE PRESENT ALLIANCE OF THE LANGUAGE TEACHER WITH THE LINGUIST, THE PHONETICIAN, THE PSYCHOLOGIST, AND THE AUDIOVISUALIST DOES NOT PROVIDE FOR OPPORTUNITIES FOR VOICE CULTURE. SINCE SUPERIOR SPEECH BEHAVIOR REQUIRES THE MOBILIZATION OF ABILITIES WHICH ARE ESSENTIALLY HISTRIONIC, THIS ALLIANCE SHOULD INCLUDE A COLLEAGUE FROM SPEECH AND THEATER, AND TRAINING SHOULD BE REVISED TO INCLUDE EXPOSURE TO THEIR SKILLS, PARTICULARLY (1) ANALYSIS OF NATIVE LANGUAGE BEHAVIOR IN VOICE, SPEECH, GESTURE, AND POSTURE, AND (2) TRAINING IN VOLUNTARY CONTROL OF SPEECH ORGANS, ARTICULATION, PROJECTION, DYNAMICS, VOICE ECONOMY, ORAL INTERPRETATION, DRAMATIC READINGS ON STAGE, AND GESTURAL LANGUAGE. IN BRIEF, THERE SHOULD BE THE DEVELOPMENT OF A CULTURED PROFESSIONAL VOICE WITH SIMULTANEOUS ENCOURAGEMENT OF HISTRIONIC TALENTS. (AUTHOR)

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VOICE CULTURE AND THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHER

Toward a Greater Alliance

Dr. Eberhard Reichmann

The goals of achievement set forth in the "MLA Qualifications for Secondary School Teachers of Modern Languages" include the ability to approximate native speech in pronunciation and intonation. It is no secret in our profession that this superior goal is not reached by a great many teacher candidates. We have made, however, significant progress. This is due to the audio-lingual substructure, and due also to a number of helpful contributions by phoneticians, applied linguists, and methodologists. But even if, for example, in the field of German William G. Moulton's contrastive study, The Sounds of English and German, were in the hands of all teacher trainees, it couldn't possibly provide patent solutions to all the problems. For in spite of its relative completeness for the student of German, it has its limitations. These limitations lie in the approach, and they are similar to other limitations of applied linguistics in language learning. The teaching and learning of pronunciation and intonation -- as part of general voice culture -- is a complex field, the total problems of which are too difficult a terrain to be surveyed and cultivated by linguists and phoneticians alone. By this I mean that the field includes a strip not marked by linguistic or phonetic road signs, an uncharted area where foreign languages and speech and theatre overlap. For some strange reason there are practically no official ties between the professionals of these two arts, as if the fact that their languages are somewhat different would bar them from communicating with each other. We know

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that successful language teaching is not an entirely independent and self-contained art. On the contrary, it draws knowledge, skill, and strength from many a field. Should speech and theatre, of all our helpful neighbors, be the exception? By what standards of interdisciplinary logic could it be justified not to seek collaboration from a discipline whose very essence is the effectiveness and the beauty of voice and speech? Isn't that one of our concerns too?

Let us first consider the aspect of voice and speech. Each craft honors its most vital tool. The foreign language teacher's most vital tool is his voice. A cultured, disciplined voice must therefore be all the more desirable, a sine qua non in the effort to reach ever higher professional standards. It is unrealistic to think that a cultured voice is simply a gift possessed by some but lacked by others. It is equally unrealistic to assume that we needn't bother because it develops sufficiently without training.

Now what about the aspect of theatre? It might be appropriate here to quote the aphorist Georg Christoph Lichtenberg who lived two centuries before the audio-lingual age:

> "Um eine fremde Sprache recht gut sprechen zu lernen,...mit dem eigentlichen Akzent des Volkes, muss man nicht allein Gedächtnis und Ohr haben, sondern auch in gewissem Grad ein kleiner Geck sein." [1]

A "Geck" is defined as: fop, dandy, conceited person, fool, person taking part in shrovetide activities. Certainly, no member of our honorable profession wants to identified in these terms (the dictionary doesn't offer ham as a possible equivalent). But there is more to Lichtenberg's "Geck" than meets the eye. Looking beneath the surface of these dictionary equivalents we find

them to have in common the elements of make-believe, masquerade, illusion, playfulness, deviation from the normal, transformation of behavior, and representation of a new identity. These happen to be principal elements of theatre. Just how do they apply to language teaching and learning, and is there room for Lichtenberg's "Geck"?

Whether one is willing to accept it or not, the fact is that the approximation of native speech requires, among other things, the mobilization of abilities that are essentially histrionic. In striving toward the goal of approximated native speech it would indeed be foolish not to avail ourselves of all possible means. It is extremely difficult to attain a second linguistic identity because our native language behavior is so much part of our existential make-up that transcending it to perfect bilingualism is only achieved in rare cases. Lichtenberg's observation may thus be interpreted as suggesting that the foreign language student and his teacher need, to a certain degree, to be "little actors." But is this not too obvious to be stated at this time? No, and for this reason: our theory of language learning to date has not assessed the place and the function of histrionics in foreign language teaching and learning. This assessment will have to come, but it will be difficult because it must include an analysis of irrational qualities of personality that defy measurement.

Powerful as our present alliances with linguists, phoneticians, psychologists, and audio-visualists may be, they do not seem to have the resources to provide an optimum in voice culture and to integrate histrionics in a respectable and effective fashion. Only in a greater alliance that includes the colleague from speech and theatre can we hope to find ways to

solve these problems. It is up to us to take the first steps.

Ingrained prejudice against "theatricality" will raise objections. This is to be expected. There are still many among us who are likewise frowning upon the "transgressions" of linguistics, the "nuisance" of the language laboratory, the "professional suicide" of programmed learning, and the "machine worship" of objective testing. Yet who can seriously doubt that the innovations of post World War II language learning are here to stay? Initial and even prolonged difficulties are inevitable. Let us therefore not look at the difficulties that lie ahead but rather at the benefits our undergraduates and future teachers may derive from a selective exposure to the skills of the professionals in speech and theatre:

1. Thorough analysis of the student's vernacular behavior in voice, speech, gesture, and posture.

2. Training: voluntary control of the speech organs, articulation, diction projection, dynamics, voice economy, oral interpretation of prose and poetry, dramatic readings acted on stage, gestural language.

In brief, work toward cultured and professional voice and speech with simultaneous development of hidden histrionic talents.

The alliance with the speech and theatre professional will not only lead to an otherwise unattainable refinement of the mother tongue, but it will also have an enormously stimulating effect on the foreign speech behavior. For the skills learned in superior voice culture of the vernacular are indeed transferable.

FOOTNOTES

1 "In order to learn to speak a foreign language really well, in a truly native fashion, one not only has to have a good memory and a keen ear, but one must also be, to a certain degree, a bit of a ham."

Dr. Eberhard Reichmann
Department of German
Indiana University
Bloomington, Indiana